



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Disaster Cleaning Products

- Cleaning up after a flood requires a lot of time, patience, and skill. It helps if you have a cleaner that is appropriate for the job and is a disinfectant.
- Cleaning products that have germ-killing power will be labeled with the word "disinfectant." Products that claim to disinfect must be registered.
- Not all cleaning agents, such as detergents, are designed to kill germs, but their use will remove large numbers of microorganisms. The word "disinfectant" must appear on the label if the product is effective in killing microorganisms.
- An antibacterial agent means that it kills bacteria. This term is used interchangeably with the term "disinfectant." However, the antibacterial agent may be less effective against viruses and parasites that also cause illness.
- Products made with pine oil cleaners often contain petroleum distillates (much like a dry-cleaning solvent) that dissolve grease easily, but they are highly flammable. These cleaners have a variety of precautionary statements based on their concentration and contents. They can be very dangerous if swallowed or if the volatile fumes are inhaled. They must be used with adequate ventilation, and all label precautions must be followed.
- Chlorine bleach is the most commonly used and least expensive disinfectant. A 5.25 percent solution of sodium hypochlorite is required for a liquid chlorine bleach to function effectively as a disinfectant. Depending on the task, bleach may be diluted in different ways. A common recommendation for a final disinfecting rinse after flood cleanup of most hard surfaces is 1/2 cup per gallon of water. If working with bleach as a cleaner, wear rubber gloves to protect your hands. Keep the room well ventilated because the fumes can be dangerous.
- In high concentrations, bleach can be quite damaging to fabrics, so the dilution recommended for laundering clothing is 1 cup per wash load for top-loading washers and 1/2 cup for regular-size front-loading washers. Bleach should not be added on top of clothes, but with a dispenser or as a diluted solution. This is necessary to prevent clothing damage. Liquid chlorine bleach will ruin wool or silk fabric. Dark or bright-colored clothing probably will be faded by liquid chlorine bleach. **Do not mix bleach with ammonia cleaners. The fumes are toxic.**

Adapted from resource material developed by the University of Illinois Extension Service entitled "After a Disaster"